

Artistic Yarn Portraits on Streetism in Ghana – Highlighting the struggles of Street Children

Edem Afful,⁺ Edem Kwami Buami,⁺⁺ Akosua Mawuse Amankwah³ & Ebenezer Kofi Howard⁴ (Ghana)

Abstract

Textile art is widely used by artists to communicate a message. This concept simply employs materials and techniques unconventionally to produce works of art that strives to gain the attention of viewers. This project exercised the concept where yarns of different textures were used in the production of works of art that falls in the ambit of textile art. These works communicate the emotional state and ordeals street children undergo on the streets of Kumasi. The philosophical underpinnings of each textile art seeks to draw the attention of citizens about the struggle of these children in our society and support to minimize their increasing numbers. In achieving the focus of the project, a conceptual framework influenced by Marshall (2010), Aesthetics-action model was developed coupled with art Studio-Based practice. Participant observation and unstructured interview were the instruments employed in the creative process. Experiments conducted under studio-settings revealed the working possibilities of materials and techniques. It was revealed that, adhesives such as uhu glue, super adesivo and Fevico SH adhere well with yarns (cotton, acrylic and polyester) depending on which yarn pattern technique used. The study however recommended strict regulation and implementation of policies on streetism that seeks to eliminate children on the streets.

Keywords: Textile Art, Techniques, Ordeals, Streetism, Yarn, Ghana, Street Children

⁺ Edem Afful, MFA Graduate, Dept of Industrial Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. email: edemafful93@gmail.com.

⁺⁺ Edem Kwami Buami, Assistant Lecturer, Dept of Industrial Art, Ho Technical University, Ghana. email: kedembuami@yahoo.com.

³ Akosua Mawuse Amankwah, Senior Lecturer, Dept of Industrial Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. email: akospaaku@yahoo.co.uk.

⁴ Ebenezer Kofi Howard, Associate Professor, Dept. of Industrial Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. email: billhowardgh@yahoo.com.

Introduction

Art in recent times is taking a gradual bend, leading contemporary artists to a path where they are keen on inculcating elements of textiles in their artistry. Artists are now desirous in the field of textiles so much so that a lot more research is being carried out to arrive at not just the basic functions textiles has to offer but also to explore alternative uses of textiles. A relevant instance is the Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama, who delved extensively to the repurposing of the coal sacks to produce an art installation centred on the conversation of commodity, migration, globalization and economic exchange (Aidoo, 2017). Another contemporary artist that can also be mentioned is Prof. El Anatsui, whose installations mimics the drapery nature of textiles even though the material he uses has no affiliation with textiles.

Benitez (2007) perceives streetism a state where individuals mostly children, are left on the streets due to circumstances such as poverty, homelessness or both. Implicit in this work reveals that, such homeless youth are termed as street kids or street children. Martin (2010) also expresses that, street girls are sometimes called gamines in Colombia. Martin further reveals that, street children may be termed as thrown-away children. Such individuals according to Martin may result from single-parent homes and neglect.

The research of The Charity Street Child (2014) reveals that, Streetism is mostly prevalent in regions such as Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. UNICEF (2015) estimated figures over 100 million children are growing up on the streets. Ball (1994) brings to light that the subject of streetism has been in existence dating from 1848. He then contends that, abandoned and orphaned children have been a source of misery from the earliest times. Bosswell (1988) also observes that over 30,000 naked and deserted filthy children could be found in London. According to Flowers (2010), there were evidence of about 7 million homeless children in Russia, This according to the author, happened by 1922 and was due to the First World War coupled with the Civil War in Russia. These abandoned children resulted in gangs, thefts and prostitution.

Nicola (2015) however reveals that, streetism as a phenomenon are caused by factors not limited to poverty, political instability, breakdown of families, social disruption, domestic violence, mental health problems etc. In a similar instance, Abari et al. opine that, streetism could be triggered by religious purposes. In this vein, these authors reveal that, children in the northern regions of Nigeria are forced to leave their homes to indenture them under a mallam. UNICEF (2015) explain that, there are about 250,000 street youth in Kenya and over 60,000 in Nairobi. Inferring from the ongoing submissions, it is very clear that, streetism or street children as a phenomenon is a global issue as it is prevalent in most parts of the world.

Emotions however play a significant role in a work of art, making the work more relatable to the masses, since emotions are engraved in our very self. Human as we are, particularly children, have the tendency of growing up with a lot of bitterness in them when their emotional needs are unattended to. Unfortunately, this very instance is prevalent in the Ghanaian society today, causing a tremendous

rise of children on the streets. The youth, especially children as opined by Awatey (2014) represents the most important human resource prospects that can significantly contribute to an immense development of a nation. Regardless of this fact, there is close to nothing being done at the local and national level to utilize in extremity, this massive potential which to an unmeasurable extent, determine the strength and resilience Ghana requires in pursuing the socioeconomic and political development goals of the nation. It is rather unfortunate that while we have a significant number of children attaining good education, we also have a significant number of children who are on the streets fighting for survival due to the inability of their parents to take care of them. Children falling prey to this unfortunate situation does not only put them at risk, but also further dents the image of our country.

Streetism is one social issue that has been on the discussion table for a while, and by far one of the commonest and unpleasant societal problems in Ghana today, which is witnessed by both the young, and the old each passing day. This menace is an issue that has engaged the minds of social workers as well as the public and it is becoming more relevant because turning a blind eye to this situation presently might graduate into a far worse problem exceeding the challenges society faces now. The concept of “streetism” refers to a way or a system where young children find themselves on the streets for various reasons but mainly as a source of shelter or employment to sustain their livelihood. The study further noted that homeless children are confronted with stressful and traumatic events which consequently results in a higher incidence of mental disorders. The violent behavior of these children was experienced by the researcher on the streets of Madina, Accra when offering money to some children on the streets. When the others caught a glimpse of what was happening, they surrounded the researcher attempting to take personal belongings such as wallet and bag. This activity persisted for a while until one of their guardians calmed them. In that moment, the researcher came to the realization that the violent nature of these children may have stemmed up from the fact that they are broken inside and by way of venting how they felt, they resorted to violence. This phenomenon struck the mind of the researcher to retell their stories through art just as artists like Aran Illingworth, Victoria and Carolyn Cohen sought to portray in their work of art so as to leave an indelible impression in the minds of onlookers.

On the brighter side, it has been observed that contemporary artists are now in the pursuit of fixing societal problems. This hunger has led to the emergence of artistic expressions or art works that seek to address societal ills, strike conversations and debates among people or even at best, be the starting point to curbing a situation. In addressing social problems, the press play a role in creation of awareness but usually their news items do not have lasting impressions in the minds of people but since art can be experienced, one tends to leave with the message dented in his or her mind.

In respect to what is driving contemporary artists in their artistic expressions, this study seeks to paint an image that reflects the exact emotional state of these unfortunate street children and also seeks to translate the issue of streetism in

Ghana through portraiture, challenging the on-looker to better appreciate the intensity of this problem and its negative impact on the country. Each portrait will attempt to reveal the inner realities of these children and put to the conscience of appropriate authorities to find sustaining solutions to the problem.

Ethics of Working with Children

One concern in research with street children involves the prospect of gaining true informed consent. It is usually not possible to secure parental consent because finding the parents – if they exist is very difficult. Researchers can get the participants' assent to participate, but in many countries, minors cannot legally give informed consent. Even if youngsters are considered "emancipated minors" because they are living on their own, many children do not have the cognitive skills to understand all the implications and possible consequences of the research (Hurley, 1997).

The problem is compounded by the lack of institutional ethical control of research with human participants in many developing countries. In Ghana, for example, binding ethical guidelines for research were not fully established and most universities still do not have ethic committees or review boards to evaluate research projects. This situation places a great burden on researchers in developing countries.

Research conducted with street children is often used to design public policies and intervention programs. However, the reliability and validity of data collected from street children are always doubtful (Aptekar, 1994).

Streetism in Ghana

First Study of Street Children on Their Physical Emotional State

There are various reasons why street children leave home, which differ between high- and low/middle-income countries (LMIC). Families conflict and child maltreatment have been established as the main reasons of leaving home in high-income countries (Hadland, Kerr, Li, Montaner, & Wood, 2009) and while these are also risk factors in LMIC, poverty is a further significant contributor (Olley, 2006). Children reported emotional problems such as sadness, crying, sleep disruptions and suicidal ideation, which did not appear to be detected by adults. Instead, all stakeholder groups recognized social withdrawal or isolation and externalizing behaviors, such as aggression, as reflection children's adjustment difficulties. Findings from qualitative research with other vulnerable groups of children, such as, refugees, children who suffered maltreatment and/or live in public care, show that capturing their voice is extremely important in planning interventions and improving services (Davison, Zamperoni, & Stain, 2017; Frauenholtz & Menderhall, 2020).

Consequently, some families, and in some cases children of migrated families or children without families in the city or elsewhere resort to living on the streets or in unauthorized places close to their stations of economic activities like water ways, along major roads and other makeshift structures.

Street children in general are viewed worldly as problems rather than humans whose first home is the street, (Awatey, 2014) in that some of them if not most of them steal to survive. Agyemang (2011) observes that, streetism is a major challenge in Ghana. Similarly, Darku (2005) makes mention of four groups of street children in Ghana. These according to him are rural migrant children, children from poor homes, children who play truancy and finally children who prefer staying on the streets to learning a trade. Making deductions from the foregoing claims, rural migrants are those children who come to the cities with the objective of seeking for greener pastures to make a living; children from poor homes are the ones forced to the streets just to make ends meet. In corroboration to the above, Jawula (2010) opines that, head porters known as 'kayaye' constitute streetism and such comprise child labourers who left their respective rural areas for the cities in order to make a living. According to Jawula (2010), the issue of labour migration from the rural to cities dates back as far as the Gold Coast Times. Advancing on this subject matter, Agyemang (2011) further makes an observation and distinguishes between three classes of street children in Ghana namely; children of the street, children on the street and abandoned children. *Children of the Street* - These refers to those children who live on the streets, selling, hawking and striving to make ends meet and at night, such find a place to sleep in the streets. This class of children during the nights, either sleep at unauthorized places or overcrowded rented places subjecting them to unforeseen circumstances like sexual abuse, bad weather conditions, verbal abuse as well as physical abuse. *Children on the Street* - These are those who live with their parents or guardians but such children are compelled to work on the streets for their own survival and also the survival of their families financially. *Abandoned Children* - This category sadly have no family, friend or helpers and are therefore forced to work on the streets. Unfortunately, such children have no place to also sleep at night and hence, migrate from one location to another for their survival.

Awatey (2014) explains that parents and guardians are expected to ensure that their wards are well-catered for in all areas be it social, moral or educational. But according to Awatey, that is not the case in most cities in Ghana. Implicit in the proceeding attributes to the menace of streetism or street children in the country. Though this phenomenon is a global distress, Awatey asserts that, it is a rather challenging subject bothering on the socioeconomic development of Ghana. Awatey further states that such children may steal to survive and this poses a threat to our society. Making inferences from the submissions of streetism in Ghana, it made evident that, it is a major challenge bedeviling the country as it is also a global challenge. It is revealed that streetism may result from factors such as poverty, neglect, migration or truancy. Nonetheless, the Ghanaian society is not made safe for socio-economic development of the country due to the major challenges streetism poses to the nation. It is against this background whereby increasing streetism continually aggravates the underdevelopment and exploitation of vulnerable children and the need to make this issue a national priority area of concern that this study seeks to examine.

Art as a Social Communication Tool

According to Elin (2012), communication from the Latin etymological perspectives 'communist,' can be in two forms namely; verbal and nonverbal. Elin further observes that, painting and drawing have been a form of nonverbal communication since ancient times till date. Thus, the oldest form of art as a communication tool dates back to the cave paintings during the prehistoric times around 30,000 BC. Nonetheless, art not limited to paintings and drawings provide the yardstick for effective communication in areas such as politics, culture, economic and social. Smith (2009) similarly clearly opines that, human beings since prehistoric times have developed artistic signs and symbols that serve as yardsticks for communicating their feelings, ideas and thoughts to each other. Such ways of communication according to Smith (2009) could be termed as cultural tools of which, paintings and drawings are typical examples. The foregoing conversation forms underpinnings whereby the above authors believe in the power of art as a yardstick for communication.

Ontarion (2017) is also of the view in the submission that, art forms a key component of communication. According to Ontarion, art such as graffiti is a medium for communicating on social issues. The preceding thought go to say that, graffiti possesses the capability and power to broadcast many messages concerning the society. Ontarion (2017) additionally asserts that, graffiti on walls and monuments during ancient Rome and Greece communicated love, social ideals and political opinions. Another art form worth mentioning as a communication tool in the 21st century is photography, specifically conceptual photography, where the central focus of the photograph is driven by ideas, symbols and themes. This form of art is geared towards bringing to visibility ones imaginations through photography to communicate messages that could touch on issues pertaining to societal issues, politics etc.

Textile artist however also use the textile materials available to them in sending across their messages. Juliana Antacruz Herrera, transformed the streets of Paris through her artistry using braided strips of colorful fabrics that have been coiled like yarns to mimic its structure. She asserts that, she visualizes the crack and potholes of the city as a canvas and by way of adding beauty to an unfortunate situation, long lengths of colored fabrics are braided and then coiled into potholes in the street. Although she sought to transform a bad situation into one that would be appreciated, her use of bright colors in her art communicates the bad state of roads to the public and authorities in an artistic way.

Beck (1987) opines that, art serves as an imperative social communication tool for the advancements of human relations via greater comprehension of human experience. Making reference to the foregoing claims reveals that, art as a communication tool serves as an appropriate medium of expression to unleash, elevate and grasp our fears, conflicts, tensions, aspirations as well as our hopes coupled with our ideals. According to Beck, art forms such as craft, architecture, music, dance, drawing, painting, sculpture, literature and drama constitute very appreciable avenues for the dissemination of social messages.

In addressing or raising awareness on some social vices in our society, artists in contemporary times have adapted varying techniques to produce textile art to drive home the brutalities suffered by the victims. Phillips (2015) observed an artist, Carolyn Harper Cohen, who experiments with techniques such as hand embroidery, batik, applique and painting to produce portraits. The subject matter of her work sought to address the brutalization of women, children and individuals belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community throughout the world. She further argues that her art provides faces to those who are faceless, nameless and powerless and comment upon the blind eye that is turned to those who are suffering. Buami et al. (2019) also uses varied textile material collected from the floor of dressmakers and other materials from landfills (conventional and non-conventional) to produce textile Art on the struggle of *kayayie* in Ghana. He adopted a technique of doodling, cross-hatching of twisted yarns, superimposing of materials to create a three Dimensional look of the ordeals of the female head potters. Victoria Villasana, a textile artist as cited in Taggart (2017) uses embroidery patterns to highlight what certain iconic individuals in the society stood for. This stitching technique was applied in some portions of a captured photograph to primarily add aesthetic value and also depict their social standing. Still employing stitching or embroidery as a technique in producing figurative textile art, Aran Illingworth adopts the same technique coupled, with applique to produce art that depicts the struggling state of women living in India. These works according to her turn to evoke the viewers' response to the predicament of women living in poverty (Gottesman, 2016).

Art is a very symbolic expression of feelings and ideas and therefore a necessity for social communication. Art as an effective communication tool, it is made evident that there are endless possibilities of utilizing art for the purposes of communicating ideas, thoughts, perception or concerns in all human and societal jurisdictions. Thus, art can be used to communicate in the circles of politics, religion, culture, social, etc. Thus, art has become a very imperative medium to which non-verbal communications are made. It is made evident that, be it, drawing, painting, sculpture, graphics, photography etc., it may serve as effective and efficient yardsticks for communication. Wherever art is seen or exhibited, there is a certain feeling or significance being communicated. Further inferences from the literature reveals that, issues pertaining to politics, human relations, social issues, religion, culture etc., may be addressed through appropriate art mediums. Art may also communicate commemorative or historical ideas. Briefly, it is of certainty that, art provides a non-verbal mode of communication among humans.

Materials and Methods

The art studio-base practice under the qualitative research approach was employed in the study.

Studio-based research in art and design according to de Freitas (2002) refers to those research projects in which creative practice plays the most important role

in the cluster of research methods used. It is usually initiated by the artist or designer in response to his/her own particular studio or design practice. Art and design studio practice results in artists and designers acquiring knowledge about concepts, materials, processes and applications.

Studio-based research method was chosen for this study because various materials were interacted and manipulated, and different creative techniques were employed in a unique way based on concepts that are likely to produce desired results. Also, the feasibility of the materials employed was experimented and the materials which could not produce desired results were replaced with alternatives.

According to Mason (2002), qualitative research aims at producing a more holistic and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data. Her thought brings to visibility that qualitative research aims at gaining a deeper insight into a subject matter, giving keen attention to an appreciable number of variables. Considering this, to be able to carefully obtain and capture the emotional state of the street children, field observations were carried to essentially appreciate their struggles. This coupled with personal interactions with the children undoubtedly gave a great insight into their ordeals which subsequently influenced the concept (broken mirror) developed in producing the portraits. This phenomenon gives a philosophy behind the art works which aims at drawing the appropriate awareness.

The art studio base practice was employed in the study. This method essentially offered the means to conduct relevant research in the subject area that influenced the production process (Marshall, 2010). This method is dependent on studio activities which required the use of materials, techniques, tools and aesthetic analysis. Considering this, appropriate images of street children were captured from the field (Accra and Kumasi), after which variants of yarn art techniques were explored. The yarn was used as a medium to effectively execute the final art pieces because in textile production chain, yarn is a textile material which has to go through a number of processes to be transformed into a finished product. This product could take the form of dyeing, weaving etc. Similarly, in connection with the subject of focus which are children, they also need to go through transforming stages that propels them into adulthood. The twist inserted in yarns reflects a certain physical texture that no other textile material can give beside a yarn. The resultant effect of these explorations then informed the production of the final art works. Systematic procedure during the creative process were carefully illustrated.

With the adaptation of Cora Marshall's aesthico-action research cycle as a foundation, a model capturing six phases (observe, reflect, plan, create. Exhibition and feedback) was developed in order to effectively attain the set objectives and in connection with the conceptual framework.

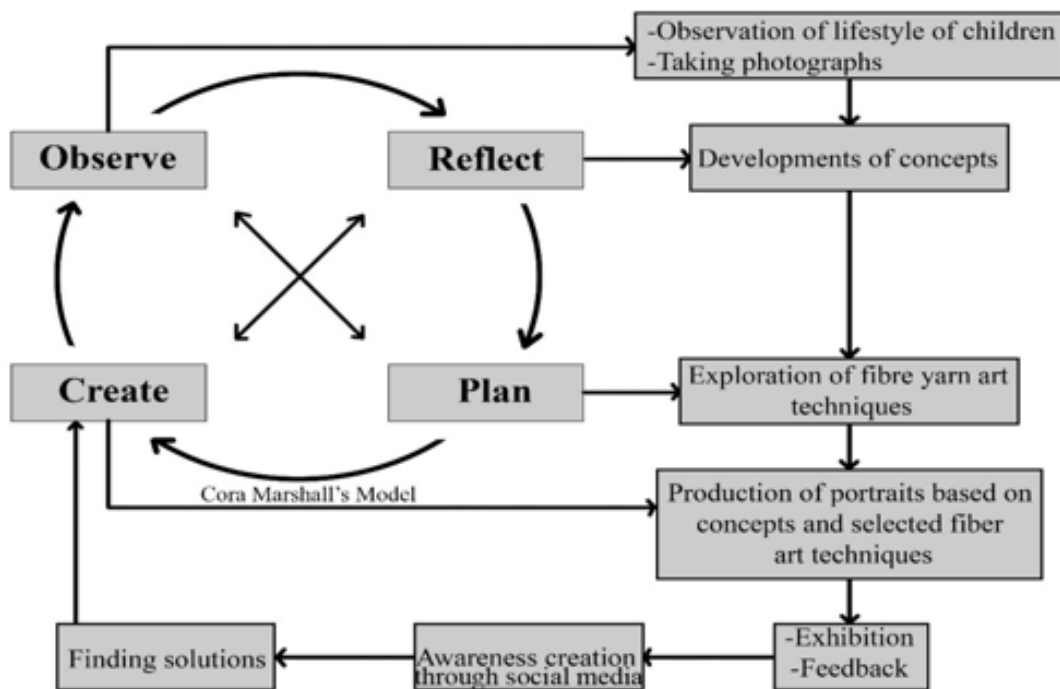


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Adopted from Aesthetico-Action Research Cycle by Cora Mashall).

Source: Researcher's Construct (2019).

Observation

Observation in research as captured by Atlas (2016) involves the direct observation of phenomena in their natural setting. It further went ahead to state the non-participation and participation as the main components of this research. Deductions from the above thoughts lead the researcher into adapting the participant observation considering the kind of emotions the study sought to invite into the project work. The participant observation permitted the use of unstructured interview where the participant (street children) responded to open-ended questions structured by the interviewer (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Moyle (2002) adds on to this statement by asserting that this type of interview aids in ensuring that the participant has full ownership of the narrative and by no way is it influenced by the interviewer. Additionally, ethical considerations were established before their imagery depicting their physical emotional state were captured. These tools aided in projecting the facial expressions the researcher sought to invite into the work as well as created avenues for questions pertaining to their livelihood to be asked.

Reflection

Reflection according to Hofman-Kipp, Artiles, and Lopez-Torres Weber as cited by Marshall (2010) is characterized by the thoughtful gathering of critical reflections and actions that highlights or reflects the underpinnings in our practice concerning our assumptions, biases, and perspectives. Based on these thoughts, brainstorming as well as the creation of concepts in alignment with what the project seeks to achieve was created. The base emphasis of the project is to put a

spotlight on the physical emotional state of these children and hence, expressing the intensity of how damaged and broken they are. A concept of depicting imagery from broken mirrors was developed. This concept was built on the grounds that, images viewed from broken mirrors are distorted and have irregular patterns and therefore, projects a sense of incompleteness. Additionally, the patterns created by broken mirrors are accidental, meaning, one has no control over the patterns broken mirror create. Linking this to the many problems street children go through, this assertion established the fact that these children also have no control over their life pattern and therefore swallow whatever life throws at them.

Planning

This stage of the model explores a variation of fibre yarn art techniques, drawing inspiration from the notable yarn painting from the people of Huichol who are inhabitant of Mexico and the art of stitching. Additionally, preliminary sketches were made to ascertain the outcome of the final project. A variation of yarns composed the main media of the project, specifically, cotton, acrylic and polyester yarn. Like gold, yarns also go through tedious phases throughout their production process. Similarly, street children are also witnesses to a significant number of struggles. Among them, according to Hai (2014) are lack of access to basic amenities, lack of protection and security, poor health and vulnerability, lack of capabilities and powerlessness, only to mention a few. Considering both scenarios, the struggle a yarn goes through necessitates a successful outcome whereas with the children, a successful outcome is undefined. The choice for the use of yarns as a media in telling the story of these street children stems out from the thought of compare both struggles and conceptually depositing the success of a yarn into the struggles of these children with a glimmer of hope that someday, their struggles would pay off.

Creation

This phase embodies the build-up of portraits that project the struggles these children go through, putting to significant use, the various fibre yarn art techniques explored thus yarn painting and stitching.

Exhibition

Since the project is centered on the issue of streetism, the final project works were taken back to the streets, for appreciation, criticisms and for the children to further dialogue with the work. Further exhibitions were done via social media for more discourses and input as to how we as a country can help reduce this unfortunate situation. This provided the researcher with information that could further make the work more meaningful.

Feedback

Results based on information gathered from the exhibition on the streets and on social media contributed philosophically to the whole artworks. In addition, some recommendations were made based on the feedbacks from the exhibitions that were carried out.

Field Study of Street Children on Their Physical Emotional State

Processing of facial expressions of emotion is fundamental to human interaction, and has significant effects on human behavior and affective state (Bourke, Douglas and Porter, 2010). Facial expressions play a significant role in unearthing a person's state of mind and even emotions that have been buried within them. As part of the conceptual framework (observe), a field survey in Madina, Accra (Personal observation, August 2018) was carried out in the pursuit of capturing images that reflected the struggles they go through. In satisfying the first objective to the study, a dialogue between the researcher and the street children were carried out with the intent of without their consent, capture their facial expression whenever a sensitive issue is brought up. This dialogue revealed some emotional expressions on their faces but per reflection and critical analysis, the images were opened to critics that suggested that the images were not engaging enough to be used to speak to the issue of streetism.

The second stage of the conceptual framework required that after observation, there is the need for reflection. Based on the reflection of these images and critics made, another field study was carried out in Adum, Kumasi (Personal observation, April 2019) but this time, accompanied with a concept broken mirrors. The study found that the issue of streetism has received considerable attention, but the discussion of it surrounds political and social views, neglecting the main subjects of the issue, the people subjected to the menace. We are more focused on how they affect the society more than how society affects them. Society has affected them physically, psychologically and even socially, as a result, they are walking beings with broken personalities. Based on this analogy, the concept surrounding the fact that reflections from broken mirrors seem to be incomplete and distorted was used to visually depict their broken identity.

Ridley (2014), put to use the same concept where the broken mirrors served as a reflective examination into her own identity reformation from the abuse she experienced as a child. The video "reflections in a broken mirror video," explored into identity using the mirror as a tool for self-reflection. According to her, through her creative process of breaking the mirror into fragment and then reconstructing them back again, the mirror metamorphosed into a tangible reflection of an existential crises. In the same vein, the accidental patterns in broken mirror conceptually, represents the many unconscious ways by which society has tainted their very existence leaving them in broken pieces.

Conceptually, that state of wholeness represents the lifestyle each child is expectation of in coming into the existence. A lifestyle where he or she feels a sense of belonging, feels loved, protected and cared for, but unfortunately these street children are hit by the ills of society, leaving them in broken pieces. In representation of these children's narrative, the mirror was disintegrated into broken pieces, which was subsequently glued back to its support. The broken mirror was then taken to the streets to capture the images of these children through the mirror and just as the mirror reflected an existential crises of Ridley, so did the images that were taken through it. Fig.2 shows the resulting images that were captured through the mirror.



Figure 2. Street children captured through the broken mirror. Source: Field research at Adum, Kumasi (2019).

As captured in Fig. the expressions on the faces of these street children in Adum, Kumasi clearly transcend from the challenges they are confronted with on the street. This undoubtedly points to their ordeals encountered as the day goes by. A critical example shown in the rightmost image in figure 2 shows a street child who from the struggle on the streets, developed a problem with his eye. This has resulted in a situation where the brother aids him to move about. Considering this, it is evident that their struggles sometimes tend to affect them physically, resulting in permanent deformities which subsequently adds up to their daily hardships on the streets.

Creation of portraits reflecting the emotional state of street children

This section clearly details the creative phase of the conceptual model. This phase is where the portraits were created which involves the process of manipulating selected images by way of minimizing the amount of colors via Adobe Photoshop, transferring the rendered image onto selected substrates and finally giving depth to the image, using yarns as a media.

Execution of Project One: The Endless Stride

Based on the images that were captured from the field, an image with the intention of giving insight to the name of project one was selected for the production process. The image through the use of Adobe Photoshop software was converted into a vector image.



Figure 3. From left to right, converting an image to a vector image, center to a vector image, right.

A wooden substrate of size 24 by 34 inches was painted with white acrylic paint. On drying, the grid lines (Fig.4, left) was drawn onto the substrate so as to be able to achieve to perfection the outline of the image. With an interval of 1 inch, nails were driven into the edges of the wooden substrate so as to be able return the continuous yarn after it has moved over a horizontal, vertical or diagonal distance. With a pencil, the vector image was drawn on the wooden substrate, after which the very dark portions of the drawn image was painted with black acrylic paint as demonstrated in Fig.4, center.



Figure 4. The production process.

With the help of Uhu glue, a single black polyester yarn was made to travel from one end to another, using the doodling yarn pattern, making sure that each strain of yarn was well winded around a nail when it gets to the edge of the wooden substrate. The process of moving the yarn over the whole surface of the image continued until the full depth of shade of the portrait was realized.

Execution of Project Two: Pain in Saturation

The selected image captured from the field was pixelated using Adobe Photoshop. This process made it possible to obtain individual colored squares. To achieve such, the following procedure was undertaken; the selected image was imported into Adobe Photoshop, which by default was placed the RGB mode. The size of the image was reduced (1728 pixels by 2160 pixels) by clicking on image from the menu bar > Image size (38 pixels by 47 pixels). The resolution was still maintained at 300 to give the best possible quality required to make visible the color squares. The image was then zoomed in to 1200%. The final pixelated image after zooming presented an image built with colors of different squares. A wooden substrate of 39 by 49 inches was prepared by way of painting with a white acrylic paint, after which with a wooden rule, grids amounting to 1,862 squares were drawn.

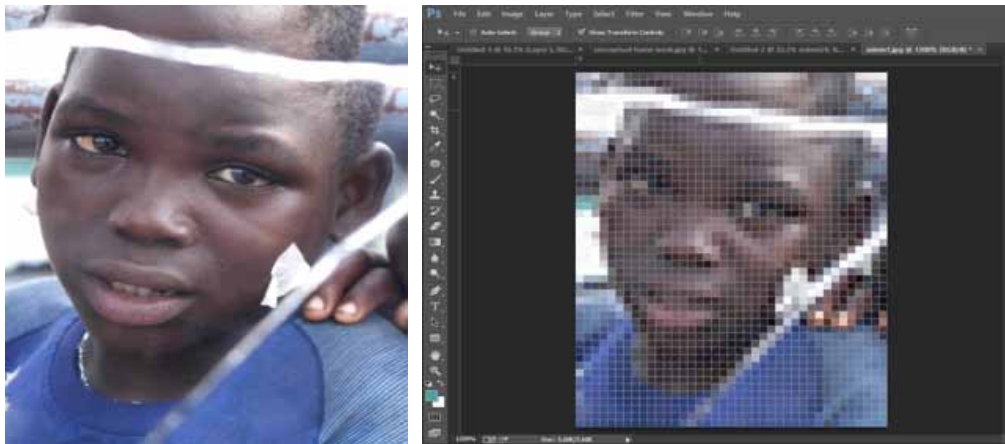


Figure 5. The pixelation process.

Using the pixelated image that was manipulated via Adobe Photoshop as a reference material, yarns of different colors and shades were winded using the tail chase pattern, together with super Adesivo in a particular fashion to fit all 1,862 square boxes (Fig.6). After the use of yarns of different shades and colors were adhered to the substrate, the final image was realized.

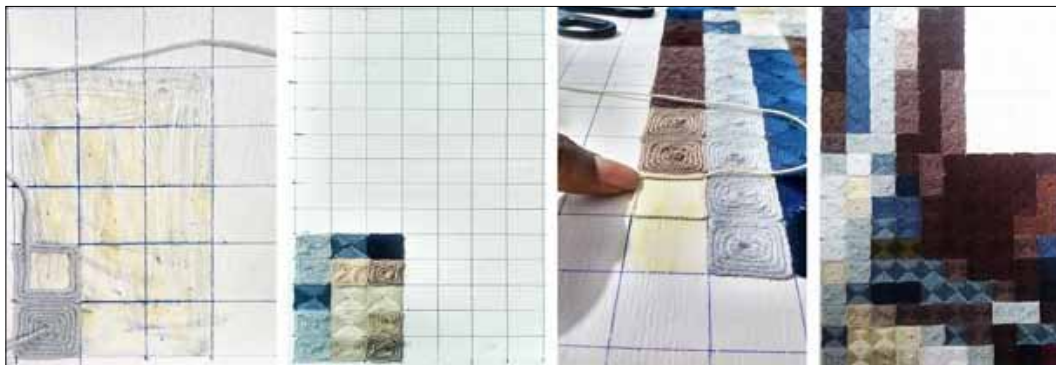


Figure 6. Adhesion of yarn to substrate.

Execution of Project Three: Wither in the Weather

With this project, stitches of different types were used in giving depth to the image. The type of stitch that was dominant in the work was a fusion of running stitches which were then overlaid and under laid with a continues yarn. This fusion mimics a weave and embroidery pattern which is popularly seen in tapestry. With project three, four individual canvases were used as the substrate. In preparing the canvas to be worked on, they were bagged in a polythene bag, put in the rain and dried in the sun so as to achieve some form of effect on them. This phenomenon created an uncontrollable stain effect on the white canvas in layers which subsequently affected its property. Stained portions were stiff, compared to other portions, which played a vital role in the philosophy.

The image was transferred onto the canvases by means of glue photo transfer. The image was firstly flipped horizontally via Adobe Photoshop; after which it was printed on a 24 by 34-inch paper. The four canvases were pieced together with an adhesive to prevent the canvases from shifting when the image is being transferred onto it. Fevico SH adhesive (white glue) was then evenly spread on the surface of the canvases. Following that process was a careful placement of the already printed image after which all canvases were turned. With the help of canvas keys, a little pressure was applied by way of stroking on the canvas back and forth to ensure the paper was well adhered to the canvas.



Figure 7. The process of transferring the image onto the canvas.

The adhered image was allowed to dry for over eight hours. On drying, a slightly wet foam was used over the glued paper, exposing the paper to a wear and tear state. With a little amount of pressure, the layers of the paper were rubbed consistently until the layer on which the printed image was exposed. In achieving a more visible image on the surface of the canvas, a little amount of vegetable oil was rubbed overall surface of the canvas. The canvases were detached from each other, following a partial detachment of each canvas fabric from the frame in order to get access to every part of the image when rendering it with the yarn. According to the shade visible in the image, yarns of similar shades were stitched in a particular order to that bring out the depth in the image.

Results and Discussion

During the field research, it was observed that most of the Ghanaians who live on the streets are migrants from the Northern part of Ghana. According to interactions with a few of them, their migration was primarily due to the fact that they struggled to make ends meet and this struggle in effect, cripples their responsibilities in taking care of their young ones. In addition, the daily ordeals of these children which may result in injuries leads to permanent deformation. This is largely due to the fact that they are unable to gain access to daily healthcare.

Feasibility of Selected Adhesives and Yarn Types on Different Substrates

These experiments are to establish the cohesive strength between various adhesives (Water glue, fevico SH, super adesivo, UHU glue and tooth paste) and yarns (cotton, acrylic, and polyester). It also ascertains the reaction of various adhesives

to selected substrates (wood, leather, fabric). Per the experiments carried out, it was discovered that super adesivo, fevico SH and UHU adhesive adhere well on wood, leather and fabric, however, their cohesive bond with yarn patterns are dependent on the rate of drying. The state at which bonding is effective also plays a significant role in pattern creation with the yarns. For example, per the experiments, it was observed that due to the fact that super adesivo adhesive bonds at a dry state, it was more suitable in the creation of well-defined yarn pattern, compared to the other adhesives. Also with the substrates experimented with, it was concluded that wood is the most suitable substrate even though the others can serve as alternates. On evenly spreading Super Adesivo adhesive on the gridded wooden substrate as seen in Fig.8, it was observed that an amount of pen ink is transferred when there is a slight drag of the adhesive across the area where the ink is visible, creating a contouring pattern. This observation can be further experimented on to ascertain the components present in the adhesive that permits the retransfer of the pen ink to add to the varying ways by which pen ink can be transferred onto other substrates.



Figure 8 a-c. Retransfer of ink after a shift of Super Adesivo Adhesive.

Even though Fevico SH's disadvantage during the experiment was deposit of glue stains on the yarn, it was recorded as the adhesive that had the highest peel strength compared to the other adhesives that were experimented with. The peel strength was so high that it peeled off portions of the substrate on which the yarn was adhered onto when the yarn was being taken off from the substrate. All the yarns (cotton, acrylic, polyester) used gave off some amount of luster but with the polyester yarn, its luster was very visible showing a symmetric balance of luster when winded in the tail-chase yarn pattern. The luster according to the yarn pattern orientation created triangular shapes at one end and its mirror image on the other end. The sequential arrangement of these yarns of different colors throughout the work then created a one up, one down diamond shape pattern arrangement as shown in Figure 9.

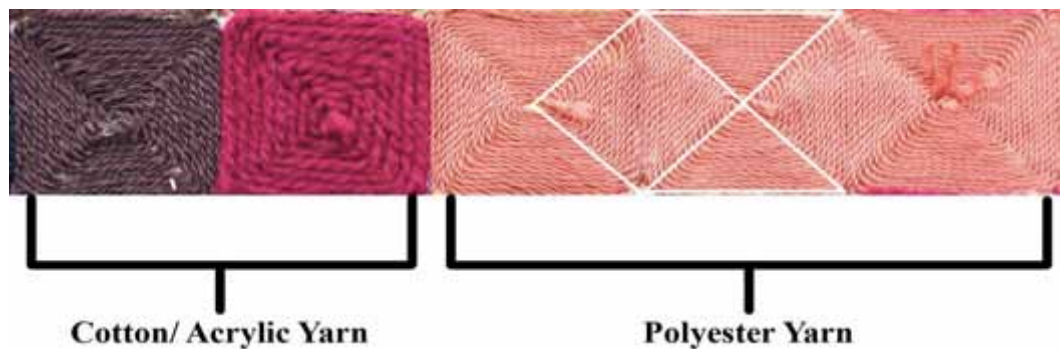


Figure 9. Luster Effect of Cotton, Acrylic and Polyester yarn.

The philosophies that detail the works of art produced are clearly outlined in this chapter. This largely giving a great insight to understanding the art that evidently relates to the happenings in the society. The choice of materials and arrangements in the art works collectively embodies the ideologies that points to the struggle of street children in Ghana. As outlined in the exhibition phase of the conceptual framework the final project works were sent back to the streets to initiate a dialogue between the works and the children who have been victimized to the menace of streetism. The result of the dialogue generated conceptual photographs which Tate (2019) describes as any use of photography within the Conceptual Art movement. These photographs further strengthened the philosophies governing each work as well as initiated discussions as to why they were on the streets. The study in addition took advantage of social media outlets specifically, facebook and instagram as a means of outdoor the project works to invite discourses centered on the issue of streetism in Ghana.

Project One: The Endless Stride

The final artwork is shown in Fig.10. The popular quote, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a step” defines this art piece. Street children begin that step only to realize that the journey never ends. This quote is in the direction of motivating every human to take a step with a glimmer of hope that they would someday reach their destination. But in the case of street children, that light that is supposed to be at the end of the tunnel is so dim that it is almost nonexistent.

These children undoubtedly undergo sufferings and challenges as they walk and stay on the streets throughout their life. In representation of the endless journey of street children, a continues yarn was made to travel from a starting point and somehow diminish in the work, in such a way that from an onlookers view, there is an identification of where the yarn started but there is absolutely no clue as to where it ended. Throughout their endless journey on the street, no matter what path they chatter, they come face to face with the dark side of the very society that is supposed to care and provide shelter over their heads. They are exposed to all forms of cruel happenings on the streets. These include road accidents, violence by individuals, rape/ sexual assault, among others. This phenomenon “hardens” and “breaks” their hearts unconsciously as they grow. This is well represented in the fragmentation of the image as well as in the contouring way with which the

yarns were adhered onto the wooden substrate. The nails that were used at the edges of the substrate personifies individuals in society who instead of helping them exit from their situation, inflict pain on them by way of verbally and physically abusing them when they ask for help (Azumah, 2019). In addition, the choice of a black yarn superimposed on a white background depicts the dark side of life that brings undue hardships to this earth we live in.

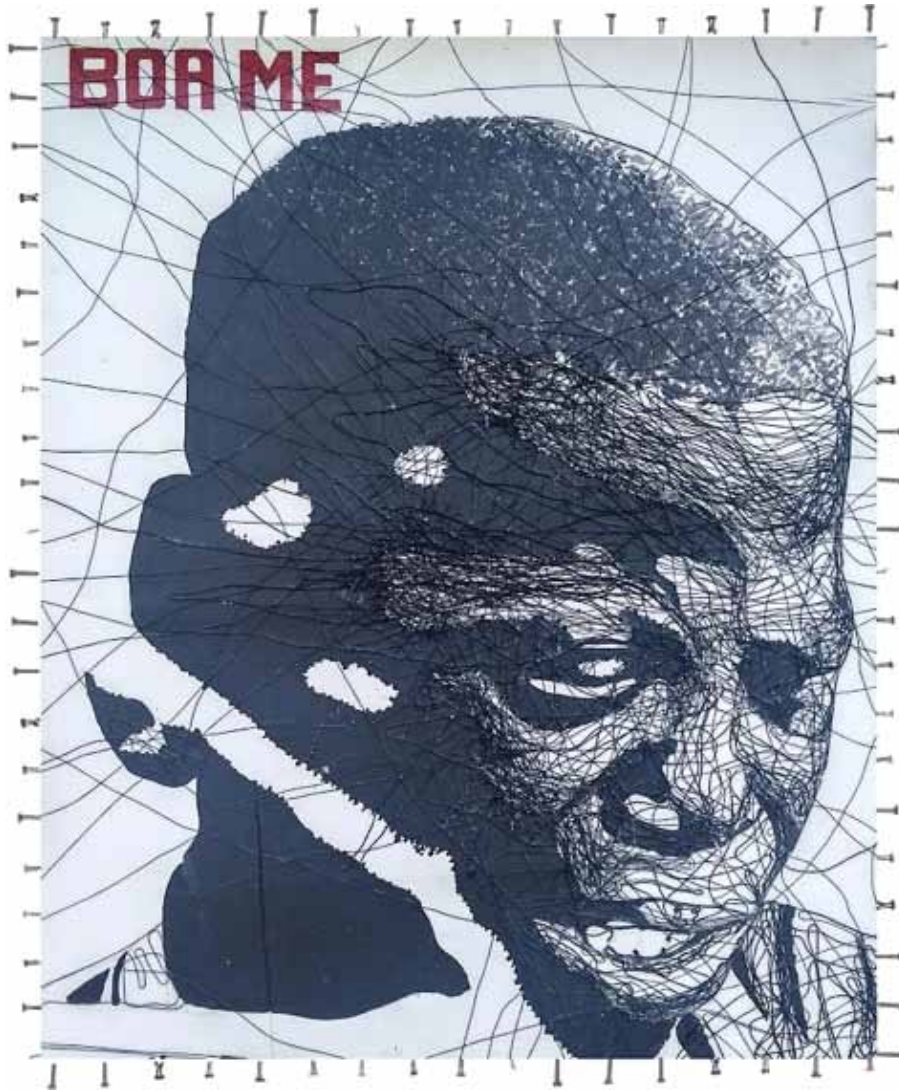


Figure 10. The Endless Stride.

Project Two: Pain in Saturation

Saturation is the depth or intensity of color present in an image. Placing this definition in context of what this project sought to achieve, pain in saturation (Fig.11) is an expression that denotes the pain of street children in full bloom. This expression was couched from the fact that this work of art hosts a significant number of color square boxes. With this art work, the whole being of an individual is characterized with small colorful squares of emotions and happenings in the society. This dovetails in a pixelated image that houses a range of color shades that

collectively form its quality. These housed colors in square blocks philosophically represents the emotional state or mood these children go through thus happiness, sadness, anger etc. According to Chapman (2010), colors carry some emotional symbolism which can contribute significantly in understanding a work of art. She further details the meanings of some colors in relation to emotions. Examples of such colors includes; white (cleanliness), yellow (hope), green (growth or new beginning), blue (calmness), dark blue (strong), gray (depression), Tan (conservation) and black (power, death or evil).



Figure 11. Pain in saturation.

Considering this, the art work displayed in Fig.11 invited all these color and what they stand for into the work. The choice of different yarn textures (rough and fuzzy for acrylic yarns, soft and smooth for polyester and cotton) further speaks to the variation of emotions and moods they experience while they are on the streets. Also, the yarns were creatively employed using the tail-chase pattern that was developed from the scribbles of the street child. This technique imitates how these children run in circles in the pursuit of chasing success by drifting from one place to another but yet, still go through an ending cycle of suffering. During the field research, there was an instance where from a distance, the researcher caught sight of a street child who was rudely sent away after he asked for money from a passerby who even though was in direct contact with the child, was negligent on the intensity of the child's struggle. This phenomenon whereby the passerby who was more closer to the child but was blind to his plight as against the researcher who even though was at a distance, appreciated the struggles the street child was going through. Making inferences from the event, there is a realization that when an onlooker is closer to the artwork, all the onlooker is previewed to are square boxes of different colors till he walks into a distance to realize the true content in the artwork.

Another observation that was made concerning the visibility quality of the image in “pain in saturation” was that, in the dark, the various colors with dark hues merges into each other presenting a clearer imagery. This observation translates into the narrative of choosing the people you call friends wisely, because false friend in the mist of darkness would readily diminish into the background, leaving the true ones on the surface who eventually would help your transition back from the dark to the light. In another vein, the artwork in darkness advocates that whenever we as humans are in a place of darkness, we should not give up and that there is always that trace of light that would propel us from that state to an imaginable state of light.

The final observation that was made after the production of this work revealed that at a squint of the eye, the image becomes clearer. Juxtaposing this observation into the realities of life, it can be deduced that in life, one should not always look or tackle situations the conventional way thus by looking at it with eyes wide opened, but sometimes one should look at situations unconventionally by squinting the eye, thus looking at them from a different perspective.

The project work “pain in saturation” was also exhibited via social media specifically Facebook and Instagram to invite their thought on the issue. In Fig.12a, (Facebook) the respondent avers that fathers play vital and essential roles in foundation building of their children by genetics and training, which goes a long way in establishing good and fertile grounds for these children to thrive in society. According to him, sadly many fathers in our generation have lived outside that purpose and abused their roles as fathers, which have contributed significantly to a number of young children who are now living on the streets. He further claims that what a nation needs primarily in curbing the issue of streetism are good responsible fathers.

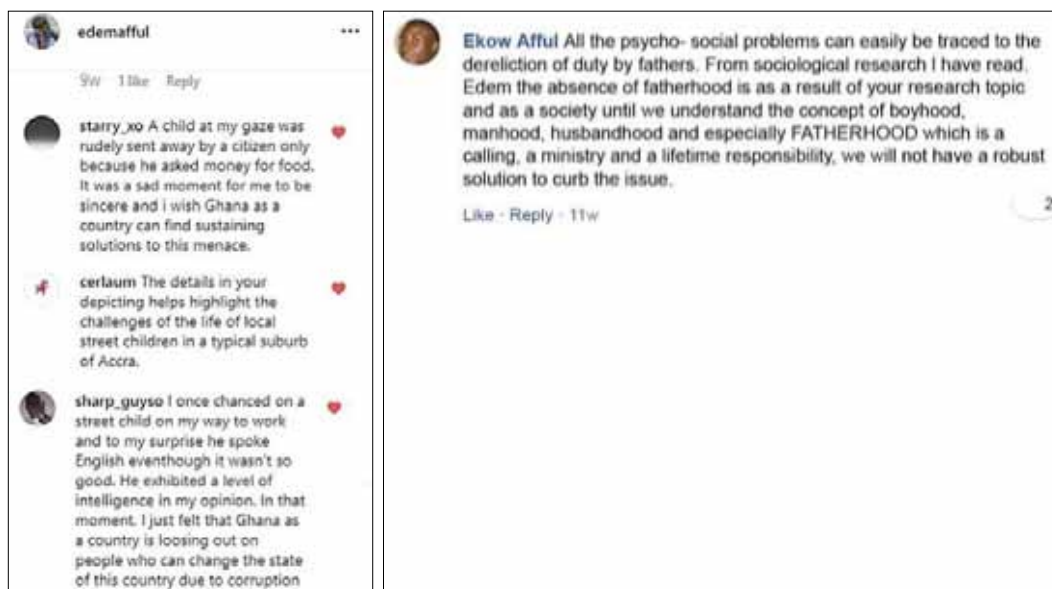


Figure 12 Exhibit responses from Instagram, left and Facebook, right.

In Fig.12, the respondents (Instagram) shared their encounter with these children, expressing how bitter they felt witnessing what they go through for their survival. According to the first respondent, she witness a street child who was verbally abused in his quest to ask for some money from a citizen. This form of abuse (Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Skodol, Brown, and Oldham, 2001) increases the risk for the development of personal disorder by increasing the likelihood these children experiencing profoundly maladaptive thoughts and feelings, such as mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, and identity diffusion during their most critical years of psychosocial development. These disorders negatively affects the personalities of these children and hence they develop a sense of resentment for the society.

The second respondent in analyzing the situation links the strain the researcher went through in the production of the project work “pain in saturation to” to the struggles these children also go through. His comment put a spotlight on how tedious the creation process was, likewise the stress these street children have to go through for their survival. The third respondent however shared an experience where a street child exhibited some level of intelligence but his potential that could have positively affected Ghana would be unrealized due to the situation he finds himself. The comments generated goes to suggest that citizens are fully conscious of the fact that streetism is an issue of paramount concern in Ghana, however there is the absence of channels for them to air their views concerning the issue. The exhibition of this artwork via social media therefore opened up an avenue for discourses and suggested as to how the issue curtailed.

Project Three: Wither in the Weather

This project (Fig.13) narrates the story of how street children lose their value over time after being on the streets over a period of time. Additionally, the work sought to expose how items including street children deteriorate gradually under weather conditions. This project began with a background story on how these children fair under hush weather conditions by way of exposing the substrate (canvas) to sun and rain. Resulting from this exercise was a canvas fabric that had on it, moldy stains. The wooden frame also having parts of it stained and chipped-off. With this exercise, one is prone to better understanding that under hush weather conditions, any item is subject to deterioration.

In the pursuit of helping these street children through the artwork “wither in the weather” the project went further to replace worn-out items with new ones so as to invite the histories of these items into the artwork. This approach according to Ibrahim Mahama in an interview with Hudson (2019) brings to their awareness the significance of mundane and common objects around them and how those objects can somehow work beyond the ordinary. These items were then put in frames as seen in Fig.14 a-d, which also speaks to the idea of them street children confining their emotions to themselves.



Figure 13. Wither in the weather.



Figure 14. Footwear belonging to street children.

This project goes to say that society has so turned a blind eye to their very situations, which is having adverse effect on them and for that matter, unable to express how they feel, leading to unrealized potentials. “What if” exposes the many possibilities of what the children on the streets could have been if they were not on the streets. In building this exhibit, a number of educated children

were asked the professions they would like to take in future. They made mention of professions like doctor, teacher, lawyer, fashion designer, pilot, nurse, engineer among others. On hearing the dreams and aspirations of these children, there was a cast back to the street children who have been denied the dream of putting thoughts to what they could do or be in future. The children in the exhibit are children who have the prerogative to dream, essentially because they have access to education. In contrast, they hold in their hand an artwork of a street child who is not priviledged to that right. In between the artwork and these children are the many unasked questions. "What if" is a visual representation of the many unasked questions concerning these street children. "What if" they were not on the streets? "What if" they were born by different parents? "What if" they had access to education?

Conclusion

Art over the years has been instrumental in the expression of one's ideas and emotions. Art based on evolutions besides its aesthetic value are now centered on speaking to issues of great concern to a country or society. In this vein, the project explored the use of fibre and yarns to speak to the issue of streetism in Ghana. Drawing from the trajectory of contemporary art textile designers, this studio based research sought to produce textile art works that effectively communicate the emotional state, suffering, struggle and undue happenings street children undergo in the very society that needs to protect them. With all the constitutional provision and policies drafted to protect child right, children are evidently abandoned by parents to wonder on the streets. This phenomenon largely exposes them to varying ordeals that put undue emotional struggle on them. As a contemporary textile artist, the project was deemed necessary to exercise my practice in projecting the emotional state/ struggle of these children on the streets of the two biggest towns in Ghana; Kumasi and Accra. Street children like other children as stated in the children's act, 1998 have the right to healthcare, food, education, shelter and clothing. Besides telling the stories of streetism, the project also sought to sensitize the public and government officials on the intensity of this social problems, thereby serving as the starting point to curbing this issue. The study has added to already existing yarn pattern designs and developed surface designs that can be adapted by interior decorators in production of designs for upholstery.

In the advancement of technology, social media has created a great platform for producers, artists, designers among others to carefully market and create the needed awareness on relevant issues through their practice. Considering this, the study recommends that designers and artists employ such media spaces to put across social issues affecting the society. By so doing, the artist obtains the views and comments from a wider audience that tend to further better the practice and subsequently propagate the issue across the media space. The increasing rate of street children is largely because incapable individuals are rampantly still giving life to children they surely cannot take care of. Government, therefore should put systems in place to be able to foretell if unborn children are at the risk of being neglected by their parents and convince them in giving the child for adoption even before the child is born. Once these systems are put in place, these individuals

would now be cautious when bringing children into the world because they would now walk with the fear of their child being taken away from them if they are unable to take care of them. Additionally, government should construct more children home centers to camp these children, monetize them and see to their needs. Policies by the government should be directed towards improving the art industry, most especially creative art exhibition. This is of importance because artists have a voice and when attended to, can go a long way in helping curb various social issues confronting the country.

References

- Aidoo, K. "Culture Trip." 2017. <https://theculturetrip.com/africa/ghana/articles/10-of-ghanas-best-contemporaryartists/> (accessed Aug 17 2019).
- Agyemang, D. O. "Ministering to Street Children Within the Kumasi Metropolitan Area: A Comparative Assessment of the Role of the Kumasi Baptist Association and the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi." PhD diss., 2011.
- Aptekar, L. "Street Children in the Developing World: A Review of Their Conditions." *Cross-Cultural Research*, (1994) 28, 195-224
- Atlas. "Atlasti." 2016 <https://atlasti.com/observationalresearch/> (accessed July 11 2019).
- Awatey, S. "Assessing the Effects of Streetism on the Livelihood of Street Children: A Case Study of Kumasi (in Ghana)." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4(9), (2014):165-174.
- Azumah, D. F. "Street Homes and Its Security Implications in Kumasi MetropolisGhana." *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 7 (2019):2324-8033.
- Beck, S. Art and Communication. 1987. <http://www.san.beck.org/Life18-Art.html> (accessed Aug 20 2018).
- Bourke, C., K. Douglas and R. Porter. "Processing of Facial Emotion Expression in Major Depression: A Review." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 44(8) (2010):681-696.
- Buami, E. Expression of the Ordeals of Kayayie Through Mixed-Media Textile Art." *Journal of Art and Design Studies*. (2019).
- Chapman, C. "Smashingmagazine." 2010. <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/01/color-theory-for-designers-part-1-the-meaning-of-color/> (accessed Aug 14 2019).
- Darku, N. A. *Holistic City Evangelism: Accra Perspective*. Bahrain: Oriental Press. 2005.
- De Freitas, N. "Towards a Definition of Studio Documentation: Working Tool and Transparent Record. Working Papers in Art and Design." 2002. <http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes> (accessed July 22 2017).
- Elin, S. "Drawing and Painting as a Tool for Communication." Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Norway. 2012."

- Frauenholtz, S., & A. N. Mendenhall. "They'll Give You a Second Chance: Perceptions of Youth and Caregivers Regarding Their Experiences in a Community-Based Mental Health System of Care." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* (2020):1-9 .
- Gottesman, S. "Textile Artists Who are Pushing the Medium Forward. Artsy." 2016. <http://www.googleweblight.com> (accessed Feb 1 2019).
- Hadland, S., T. Kerr, K. Li, J. Montaner & E. Wood. "Access to Drug and Alcohol Treatment Among a Cohort of Street-Involved Youth." *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 101(1-2) (2009):1-7.
- Hai, M.A. "Problems Faced by the Street Children: A Study on Some Selected Places in Dhaka City, Bangladesh." *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research* 3(10) (2014):.45-56.
- Hudson, A. YouTube. 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjQWUlxn3Ss&t=225s> (accessed May 16 2019).
- Hurley, J. C. "Children's Capacity to Give Truly Informed Assent for Research Participation and Their Understanding of Debriefing." Presentation at the *Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development*, Washington, D.C., Apr. 1997.
- Jawula, L. M. N. D. "Kayayei in Ghana: A Case of Policy Failure." 2010. <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=18956> (accessed May 16 2019).
- Johnson, J. G., P. Cohen, E. M. Smailes, A. E. Skodol, J. Brown and J. M. Oldham. "Childhood Verbal Abuse and Risk for Personality Disorders During Adolescence and Early Adulthood." *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 42(1) (2001):16-23.
- Marshall, C. "A Research Design for Studio-Based Research in Art." *Teaching Artist Journal* 8:2 (2010):77-87, DOI: 10.1080/15411791003618597.
- Martin, G. *Terrorism and Homeland Security*. SAGE Publications.2010.
- Mason, J. *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd Edition, Sage Publications, London. 2002.
- Moyle, W. "Unstructured Interviews: Challenges When Participants have a Major Depressive Illness." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 39(3) (2002):266-273.
- Olley, B. O. "Social and Health Behaviours in Youth of the Streets of Ibadan, Nigeria." *Children Abuse and Neglect* 30(3) (2006):271-282.
- Ontarion. "Embracing Graffiti as a Form of Art and Communication." 2017. <https://theontarion.com/2017/03/08/embracing-graffiti-as-a-form-of-art-and-communication/>(accessed Aug 10 2018).
- Phillips, R. "The Healing Power of Art." 2015. <https://www.healing-power-of-art.org/carolyn-cohen-creates-artabout-social-issues/> (accessed May 16 2019).

Ridley, S. "Who am I? Reflections in a Broken Mirror" Art Therapy Online, 5(1) 2014.

Smith, J. *What is Contemporary Art?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2009.

Textile Technology. "Introduction to Textile Fibre." 2018. <http://www.textechdip.wordpress.com> (accessed Aug 1 2018).

Streubert, H. J. and D. R. Carpenter. *Qualitative Research in Nursing: Advancing the Humanistic Imperative*. 1999.

Taggart, E. Artist Crafts Large Beautifully Textured Weavings You Can Hang on Your Wall. 2018. <https://mymodernmet.com/textile-art-wovenwall-hanging-tammy-kanat/> (accessed July 19 2019).